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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the ways in which reading and listening processes are alike and dissimilar, evaluates some findings by researchers and teachers, and suggests avenues for future study in this area. Although reading and listening make different demands upon the person on the receiving end of the communication, both are concerned with the decoding part of the communication process, and each seems to be a complex of related skills components. In addition, high correlations exist between test scores in reading and listening. Stages in the development of a model language-arts curriculum designed to teach critical thinking by developing listening and reading skills would include the identification and selection of mental processes believed to be most useful and most capable of being approached through language, the translation of these processes into reading and listening skills, and the assembling of a collection of teaching strategies. (KS)

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Listening and Reading

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The relationship between listening and reading has long been an area of interest. The similarities between the two are seemingly simple and pedagogically provocative. For example, reading for main ideas, that often drilled-upon "basic comprehension skill" of the workbooks, and listening for main ideas seem to be the same kind of operations; if they are, then surely one can be taught to reinforce the other, or possibly to economize on classroom time, be taught in place of the other. Yet, despite the seeming similarities, listening is not reading. Unlike the listener, the reader may take his time getting the message; he may return to a passage earlier read to double-check a fact or verify part of a syllagism. The listener, on the other hand, has non-linguistic features of communication available to him that the reader almost never has: he can check a speaker's facial expressions; he can listen for the speaker's use of stress, pitch, and pause as they work to make clear the speaker's intent; he can even interrupt the speaker and ask for clarification or instant replay.

Are then listening and reading so different that no practical purpose exists for exploring possible relationships? Or are they similar enough so that likenesses can be exploited in the classroom to expedite instruction, to reinforce skills, to save time for both the learner and teacher? The questions are provocative for many teachers and researchers. There are teachers who have attempted to explore possible relationships and who have discovered fresh, interesting teaching strategies in this area, and there are educational researchers who have designed and replicated ingenious studies to discover more about how listening works and how it relates to reading.

It is the purpose of this paper to look again at listening and reading, to review what has been learned by both teachers and researchers, to evaluate some of the information, insights, and findings which exist, and to suggest some possibly fruitful avenues for teaching and further research. The first part of the paper will examine ways in which listening and reading are alike and ways in which they are dissimilar.

The second part will look at the "thinking-base" of both listening and reading and examine directions teaching and research might take in the future. (This paper does not touch upon listening as the basis for all reading instruction in the sense that reading is normally superimposed on a listening foundation and that the ability to listen seems to set limits on the ability to read. Neither will it treat the aesthetic dimension of listening so important in the teaching and enjoyment of literature.)

I

Listening and reading are dissimilar in a number of ways and these differences need to be examined in order to better understand the ways in which the two seem to be comparable and perhaps mutually reinforcing. It may be noted, first, that the situations or communications contexts are different in many respects. The reader is usually alone with the printed page; he can neither ask it questions nor pick up signals apart from the print the writer has indicated. The listener, on the other hand, has his communicator there before him; he can interrupt, cajole, insist upon clarification; he has also the advantage of being able to study facial expressions, eyebrow movements, subtle bodily twitches, etc. He can also, if he has developed minimal sophistication in the language pick up signals from the way the speaker delivers his message, that is, he can note the suprasegmental patterns, the speaker's use of stress, pitch, and juncture. (The speaker who stresses "boys" in "The boys on our street like Tom " implies, perhaps, that the girls do not; the speaker who stresses "our" in the same sentence may imply that boys on other streets do not; the speaker who raises his basic pitch on "Tom" gives the statement an interrogative direction.) The use of italics and the punctuation system never quite replace the mechanisms that the speaker and listener take for granted. The whole speaking - listening context is affected, too, by considerations that rarely influence the reader. The

listener can be powerfully influenced by the loudness or softness of the speaker's voice, by his politeness or rudeness, by seemingly trivial and non-linguistic features such as the color of his tie (or its absence in certain contexts), his hair style, the button he wears in his lapel. All of these non-linguistic features and more shape in a variety of subtle ways the actual message. As one researcher points out in a review of the ways in which critical reading differs from critical listening, "a political speech delivered against the background of imposing music may give an impression of dignity and power to an otherwise vapid oration" (Lundsteen, 1964).

There is another way in which listening differs markedly from reading: each takes place in a very different time context. The reader can look back to check his interpretation of a fact; he may stop when fatigued and return to the page when refreshed; he can look ahead to make sure he understands the writer's purpose or plan of direction; he can even refuse to be communicated with by shutting the book. The listener can do none of these; he is caught in the inexorable movement of time. He may be able to unterrupt the speaker but he cannot go back in time; he must trust to his memory which maybe spotty or inaccurate. And, he cannot project forward to check the speaker's intentions or plan of presentation.

Reading and listening, then, are not quite the same; they are two different modes of language reception, each operating by different game rules and each making somewhat different demands upon the person on the receiving end of the communication. Accepting these differences, however, it is still important to examine ways in which the two are alike for it is because of their similarities that the area of listening and reading is so provocative to many teachers and researchers.

Both are concerned with the intake half of the communications process. Since the 1930's, many teachers, curriculum specialists, and researchers have defined the language arts as "reading, writing, speaking, and listening." This definition was based upon a communications model which placed speaking and writing at one end of the communications framework, and listening and reading at the other; speaking and writing in the "output" bracket had to do with the production of ideas and the expression of opinion, while listening and reading, their opposites, were in the "input" bracket in that they had to do with the consuming of the speaker's or writer's ideas and opinions (Commission on the English Curriculum, 1952). To use two terms currently in vogue, speaking and writing are at the encoding side of the communications situation and listening and reading are at the decoding side.

This model still makes reasonably good sense. If one accepts it, then obviously, reading and listening are alike. Both are concerned with intake, not with the production of messages but with their acceptance into a system. Because most reading research since the 1930's has been predicated upon this communications model, most examinations of listening and reading have started out by recognizing that both listening and reading have at least one feature in common: both have to do with the receiving end of communication. (For a different view, see Sticht).

High correlations exist between test scores in reading and listening. A second way in which they are alike is that test scores in the two areas have always correlated highly. When researchers have examined test scores in reading and listening obtained from the same populations the coefficients of correlation have always run high and positive. For example, Ross in one study reported a coefficient of .74; Brown in another found coefficients of .82, .76, and .77 at various grade levels; Duker in examining several studies reported an average coefficient of .57. Despite some various questions raised about the listening

tests used to establish these correlations (see Devine, 1968), it seems apparent that listening and reading are related, at least in terms of the abilities listening and reading tests measure.

Each seems to be a complex of related skills components. It is this third area of relationship that most interests many teachers and researchers and which ought to be examined in more depth. Reading and listening both seem to be a complex of related skills components; both reflect, at the language or applied level, the same higher mental processes; both may be broken down into the same, or almost the same, sub-skills. Almost all reading research, especially the research that has been most directly educational in its motivations, has been predicated upon the belief that reading is made up of such skills as reading to follow a sequence, reading to find main ideas, reading to recognize supporting details and examples, reading to recognize inferences, etc. Such break-downs are the bases of almost all basal reading programs, most teaching materials, and much reading research (Devine, 1969). From its earliest development as an area for teaching and research, listening has been treated in the same way. It has been accepted as a composite of separate processes or sub-skills, almost identical to their counterparts in reading: listening to follow a sequence of ideas, listening to find a speaker's main ideas, listening to recognize supporting details and examples, listening to recognize a speaker's inferences, etc. (See Smith, Goodman, and Merideth; Lundsteen, 1971; and the Brown-Carlsen Listening Comprehension Test, 1949, or the STEP Listening Test).

When one examines specialized areas of listening and reading, such as critical reading and critical listening, the same kind of break-down into separate processes or sub-skills is apparent in the literature of teaching and research. In critical reading, for example, one finds distinguishing fact from opinion, recognizing a writer's bias, noting emotionally-charged words, or evaluating a writer's sources of information; in critical listening, distinguishing a speaker's

facts from opinions, recognizing a speaker's bias, noting a speaker's use of emotionally-charged words, or evaluating a speaker's sources of information.

If listening and reading are composites of related sub-skills, then it is possible to draw some important inferences for teaching. If, for example, reading for main ideas and listening for main ideas are comparable in that they both reflect at the language level the same mental process, then perhaps both could be taught together so that one re-inforces tha other or taught so that one replaces the other to effect economy in teaching time. The possibilities here are provocative, and many teachers have explored them. This is still, however, a largely uncharted area in teaching and research. One study that suggests itself is to (1) select three critical reading skills such as distinguishing between fact and opinion, recognizing a writer's bias, and noting loaded or emotionally-charged words and three comparable critical listening skills such as distinguishing between a speaker's facts and opinions, recognizing a speaker's bias, and noting a speaker's use of loaded words; then (2) teach the critical reading skills to one group of students and the critical listening skills to a second group; and (3) test the reading group with a listening test and the listening group with a reading test.

Several attempts have been made to teach reading in general, that is withouthighlighting specific sub-skills, and testing in listening, and then teaching listening as a generalized skill and then testing for reading improvement. The results have generally been negative (Devine, 1968). Only a few researchers have yet tried to directly teach one set of sub-skills in reading and test for the comparable sub-skills in listening, and vice-versa (Evans; Leeds). There is some evidence, as Lundsteen has indicated, that instruction in listening <u>may</u> bring improvement in reading. She notes twelve studies covering almost all grades and IQ levels which suggest that listening instruction may have enhanced reading achievement, especially at the first grade level (Lundsteen, 1968).

This whole area, however, has still not been studied in enough depth to make generalizations or suggest definite changes in teaching practices.

II

The above examination of the ways in which reading and listening are related leads to some inferences about the relationship which have yet to be discussed in any depth in the research literature and to some interesting possibilities for further research and classroom practice.

It may be that all instruction in reading beyond the very first or decoding stage is really training in how to think. It may be, too, that the teaching of listening -- beyond basic instruction in following directions or paying attention -- is actually training in thinking. The terminology found in reading skills books is revealing; reference is made to "reading to find main ideas," "reading to note supporting details," "reading to recognize inferences." The processes the terminology attempts to describe have as much (or more) to do with thinking as with reading. The same may be noted of the terminology used in listening instruction; "listening for a speaker's main ideas," "listening for supporting details," or "listening to recognize inferences" describe thinking activities as much as listening. Underlying both listening and reading skills probably are the same or similar mental processes.

One way, then, to better understand the relationship between reading and listening and their relationship to thinking is to recognize that reading and listening have a common thinking-base. There are probably a variety of identifiable higher-mental processes behind the reading and listening skills and the listening and reading skills are probably reflections of these higher-mental processes at work. When teachers attempt to teach the reading skills of recognizing a writer's inferences, or reading to distinguish between valid or invalid inferences, or reading to support inferences, they are probably developing the ability to use the higher-mental process of recognizing inferences or

the related process of inference - making.

If one accept this point of view, the inferences to be made about the teaching of listening and reading are provocative. Teachers have long paid lip-service to the notion that one of the aims of education is to make students think. Indeed, one influential national education association in the United States has declared that the first goal of all education is the development of critical thinking. An examination of curriculum guides and courses of study for many school systems reveals a similar commitment to the teaching of thinking. However, random visits to classrooms seldom uncovers systematic attempts to help children and young adults master methods of effective thinking. While individual teachers often create highly stimulating lessons and learning activities that promote thinking beyond simple memorization, little evidence exists of rigorous, school-wide programs for the improvement of thinking (Devine, 1964).

What has all this to do with the teaching of reading? It may be that those most directly responsible for teaching reading and listening, the reading and language arts teachers -- at every grade level -- have the greatest potential for actually improving the thinking capacities of youth. If reading and listening skills are recognized as reflections at the language or applied level of specific thinking processes, then it may be possible to construct a reading - language arts curriculum, extending from the primary levels through secondary school, which truly fosters effective thinking.

Stages in the development of such a model curriculum would include (1) the identification and selection of those higher-mental processes believed to be most significant, most useful, and most capable of being approached through language, (2) the "translation" of these processes into reading and listening skills, and (3) the assembling of a collection of teaching strategies. These stages are discussed below.

Selecting significant thinking processes. -- Teachers, reading specialists,

curriculum specialists, and others involved in the preparation of the curriculum would need, first, to identify and select those higher-mental processes they considered most useful and most capable of being treated in a language context. For organizational thinking, they might select such processes as identifying main or central ideas, identifying supporting examples and details, or placing ideas in sequence of importance. For critical thinking, they might choose distinguishing fact from opinion or recognizing inferences.

Translating processes into skills. -- These higher-mental processes, mental constructs as they stand, need to be translated next into appropriate language skills. The process, identifying main ideas, may be re-stated, for curriculum terms, as two language skills, the reading skill of identifying a writer's main ideas and the listening skill of identifying a speaker's main ideas. The higher-mental process of recognizing inferences may be best seen in a language context as the reading skill of recognizing a writer's inferences or the listening skill of recognizing a speaker's inferences.

Collecting teaching strategies. -- The third stage in developing this teaching-curriculum model would be to develop workable teaching strategies. Teachers who will later implement the model in the classroom may provide a valuable source of tested teaching activities and methods. The professional literature in reading is rich, too, in instructional strategies; recent articles and books contain countless, valuable suggestions for moving from the identification of the most important thinking processes, through their translation into lists of appropriate reading-listening skills, to, finally, actual learning in the classroom. (For excellent teaching suggestions, see Webber, 1974.)

The possibilities for developing a teaching program in the language arts that would stress reading and listening as tools for thinking and avenues for getting at the thinking processes are not only viable but, as implied, stimulating for teachers curriculum planners, and designers of educational research.

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